

1942.

NEW ZEALAND.

EDUCATION:

CHILD WELFARE, STATE CARE OF CHILDREN, SPECIAL SCHOOLS, AND INFANT-LIFE PROTECTION.

[In continuation of E-4, 1941.]

Presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency.

SIR,—

11th August, 1942.

In presenting my report on the work of the Child Welfare Branch for the year ended 31st March, 1942, I would refer interested readers to my previous reports regarding the functions of the Branch and other details.

Although the permanent staff has been depleted, an endeavour is being made by the appointment of temporary officers to keep the work up to an efficient standard.

Institutions.—The new Training Centre at Levin for older boys which was opened during the year is now in full working order. On an average there were 36 boys in residence.

At Caversham the new Boys' Home was completed during the year and is now in occupation.

Conference of Child Welfare Officers.—The first conference of Child Welfare Officers in the Dominion took place at Wellington last October. This conference was limited to representatives from the four main centres and managers of the larger institutions. It was rather a working conference to prepare the way for regional conferences to be held later at which all officers would attend.

Co-ordination of Welfare Services.—The matter of ensuring better co-ordination of all services, both government and private, in matters affecting child welfare in all its aspects—the goal for some years now—progressed a further stage during the year by closer co-operation with certain other Departments of the Service. The next step is closer co-operation with private organizations; it is hoped to arrange meetings with representatives in the main centres in the near future.

Preventive Work.—I look upon preventive work as the most important activity of the Branch, and the whole policy is centred around the preservation of the family unit.

Child Placement.—The first aim is to deal with a child in its own home. Failing this, placement in a selected foster-home is regarded as the next best procedure. Under present conditions increasing difficulty is being experienced in finding a sufficiency of suitable foster-homes.

Education.—At the 31st March, 1942, 244 children under guardianship were receiving post-primary education. Of these, 97 were taking technical courses, 22 commercial, 9 home science, and 10 Maori children were attending Maori colleges. The remainder were taking professional and other courses.

Placement in Employment.—Every effort is made to place each child in the most satisfactory way when the time comes for him to enter employment. His own vocational preferences, as well as his aptitudes, are investigated, and every endeavour is made to place him in accordance with sound principles of vocational guidance.

Discharge.—During the year 469 children were discharged from control. The average age on discharge was 16 years 5 months. Each child is given his discharge as soon as he has reached a position where he no longer requires the Department's assistance either in regard to his support or in regard to the stabilizing of his conduct.

Children's Courts.—In Table 2 I have for comparative purposes included the Court appearances for the past three years. These indicate a fairly satisfactory position in that there has been little increase in the total numbers of children appearing for offences. As more parents are required to be absent from their homes for war purposes increasing difficulties in this regard will, it is anticipated, be met.

Some difficulty arises in this matter owing to a lack of uniformity in laying charges or informations against children, but it is hoped to remedy this in the future. Meanwhile the totals taken one year with another give some indication of the incidence of delinquency as a whole.

Children placed under Legal Supervision.—The tendency is for the Courts to use increasingly the facilities afforded under orders of supervision by Child Welfare Officers. The total number under supervisory orders at the end of the year was 1,123. I am pleased to report that the majority of the children make good under this form of control.